GALLERY 26

THE BOXES OF JOSEPH CORNELL

Joseph Cornell was born in New York City in 1903. He lives in Flushing, New York. For many years he has created collages and "boxes" made up of both rare and common objects and images.

Joseph Cornell's boxes are the work of a gifted, sensitive, and natural artist. They present a hermetic and silent world, enigmatic but evoking moods reminiscent of the spirit of Symbolist poetry. Although Cornell's work has been of great interest to the French Surrealists and has even been included in some of their exhibitons, he has never been a follower of doctrinaire Surrealism. To the extent that his work is Surrealistic, it is instinctively so, a fact which may mean that he is the truest Surrealist of all. Yet, he does not share the interest of many of the other artists of this movement in shocking, erotic, and even sometimes vicious subjects. The basis of his art is not Freudian, but true fantasy in the purest and most innocent sense.

His boxes bring together an incongruous array of objects and images. Often beginning with pages cut from old journals and books, he organizes - in the most precisely balanced way - a world of sheer poetry. He is extremely sensitive to color and texture and the boxes often contrast the roughness of weathered wood, cracked and peeling paint, whitewashed cork, and sand with shiny metal rods and rings, glistening glass, and glowing marbles. Warmth and coldness, softness and brittle hardness, roughness and smoothness, all play important roles in creating the desired atmosphere. Maps, architectural plans, astrological signs, pages of old books and manuscripts, charts, graphs, and reproductions of classical works of art, all are grist for the mill of the artist. Out of these he creates a magical world that is normally lost with the innocence of childhood. It is a world of star-filled night skys, snowy landscapes, the sea-side, penny arcades, white doves, of the magic of silent films, and, above all, of the simple wonder of the world first discovered.

The images and objects are not related in ways that make good common sense. It is pointless to try to decipher them in a logical way. They make sense, however, in that they "feel" right. They seem to belong together and they evoke meaning in terms of mood - or, perhaps more correctly, subjective experience.

Thus, the boxes created by Cornell are aesthetic metaphors made up of many metaphors. They are enclosed spaces which become a microcosms of ordered form and poetic meaning. These small worlds are precisely and impeccably controlled by the artist, yet chance still plays a role in the changing relations of the moving components, even though within the limits of the structure.

SAND ON SAND PAINTING BOX NO. 1

SAND ON SAND PAINTING BOX NO. 2

SAND ON SAND PAINTING BOX NO. 3

SAND ON SAND PAINTING BOX NO. 4

SOUS MARINE

SPACE BOX NO. 1

HABITAT

HOTEL DE L'ETOILE

NIGHT SKY: PAVILLION

HABITAT: PALAIS DE CRISTAL

SPACE BOX: LUNAR LANDSCAPE

SPACE BOX NO. 2

SPACE BOX: CASSIOPIA MAJOR CONSTELLATION

SPACE BOX NO. 3

COLUMBIER

VIDEO
CONTEMPORARY COLLECTION OF
THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART 64.143

SEA SHORE BOX
LENT BY K. W. MERKEL

Some of the works in this exhibition are for sale. For further information please inquire at the Information Desk or call Extension 331.